

A Brief History of Modern Superpowers

From schoolbooks to popular culture, Americans have been fed a steady diet of propaganda that has led them to support reactionary policies around the globe even while fancying themselves advocates of human progress, as historian William Blum explains.

By William Blum

From the Congress of Vienna of 1815 to the Congress of Berlin in 1878 to the "Allies" invasion of Russia in 1918 to the formation of what became the European Union in the 1950s, the great powers of Europe and the world have gotten together in grand meeting halls and on the field of battle to set the ground rules for imperialist exploitation of Latin America, Africa, Asia and Australasia, to Christianize and 'civilize', to remake the maps, and to suppress revolutions and other threats to great-power hegemony.

They have been deadly serious. In 1918, for example, some 13 nations, including France, Great Britain, Rumania, Italy, Serbia, Greece, Japan and the United States, combined in a military invasion of Russia to "strangle at its birth" the nascent Bolshevik state, as Winston Churchill so charmingly put it.

And following World War II, without any concern about who had fought and died to win that war, the Western powers, *sans* the Soviet Union, moved to create the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO, along with the European Union, then joined the United States in carrying out the Cold War and preventing the Communists and their allies from coming to power legally through elections in France and Italy. That partnership continued after the formal end of the Cold War.

The United States, the European Union and NATO are each superpowers, with extensive military, as well as foreign policy integration, almost all EU members are also members of NATO; almost all NATO members in Europe are in the EU; almost all NATO members have had a military contingent serving under NATO and/or the U.S. in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans and elsewhere.

Together, this Holy Triumvirate has torn apart Yugoslavia, invaded and devastated Afghanistan and Iraq, crippled Iran, Cuba and others with sanctions, overthrown the Libyan government, and are on the verge now of the same in Syria. Much of what the Triumvirate has told the world to justify this wanton havoc has concerned Islamic terrorism, but it should be noted that prior to the interventions in Iraq, Libya and Syria all three countries were secular and modern. Will the people of those sad lands ever see that life again?

In suppressing the Left in France and Italy, and later in destabilizing the governments of Libya and Syria, the Holy Triumvirate has closely aligned itself with terrorists and terrorist methods to a remarkable extent. [For France and Italy, see [Operation Gladio](#) Wikipedia; and Daniele Ganser, *Operation Gladio: NATO's Top Secret Stay-Behind Armies and Terrorism in Western Europe* (2005)]

In Syria alone, it would be difficult to name any Middle East terrorist group associated with al-Qaeda, employing their standard car bombings and suicide bombers, that is not taking part in the war against President Assad with the support of the Triumvirate.

Is there anything, legally or morally, the Triumvirate regards as outside its purview? Any place not within its geographical mandate? Britain and France have now joined Turkey and Arabian Peninsula states in recognizing a newly formed opposition bloc as the sole representative of the Syrian people.

"From the point of view of international law, this is absolutely unacceptable," Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev declared. "A desire to change the political regime of another state by recognizing a political force as the sole carrier of sovereignty seems to me to be not completely civilized."

France was the first Western state to recognize the newly formed Syrian National Coalition and was swiftly joined by Britain, Italy and the European Union. [Agence France Presse, Nov. 26, 2012] The neck irons tighten.

The European Union in recent years has been facing a financial crisis, where its overriding concern has been to save the banks, not its citizens, inspiring calls from the citizenry of some member states to leave the Union. I think the dissolution of the European Union would benefit world peace by depriving the U.S./NATO mob of a guaranteed partner in crime by returning to the Union's members their individual discretion in foreign policy.

And then we can turn to getting rid of NATO, an organization that not only has a questionable *raison d'être* in the present, but never had any good reason-to-be in the past other than serving as Washington's hit man. [For the best coverage of the NATO monolith, sign up with StopNATO. To get on the mailing list write to Rick Rozoff at r_rozoff@yahoo.com. To see back issues at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato>]

William Blum is the author of *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2*; *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*; *West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir*; *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*. Portions of the books can be read, and signed copies purchased, at www.killinghope.org. This article was originally published in Blum's Anti-

Susan Rice's Revolving-Door Problem

Susan Rice's possible promotion from U.S. Ambassador to the UN to Secretary of State continues to come under fire, now over her apparent conflicts of interest with African clients from her days as a private consultant, notes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

It is difficult to remember the last time a not-yet-and-maybe-never-secretary-designate of some cabinet department got as much preemptive opposition as Susan Rice has been getting regarding the job of Secretary of State.

One of the lines of criticism, highlighted by Helene Cooper in the *New York Times*, concerns Rice's coziness with some African strongmen and in particular with Rwandan president Paul Kagame. A specific twist regarding Kagame is that he was Rice's client when she worked between government stints at Intellibridge, a consulting firm that also provided other former Clinton administration officials with out-of-government employment.

It is hard for an outsider to judge whether Rice's handling of African issues at the United Nations since she came back into government has represented a compromise of integrity and, if so, how U.S. diplomacy may have suffered. There does seem to be a pattern of Rice wanting to go easy on Kagame, notwithstanding his government very likely being the principal backer of rebels who are causing the latest round of havoc in eastern Congo.

But Rice's supporters argue that a behind-the-scenes approach is more likely than public castigation of Kagame's government to ameliorate the mess in the Great Lakes region of Africa. The sorts of attributes of Rice and her record that Jacob Heilbrunn has identified are probably more important in assessing whether she is qualified to be Secretary of State.

The past dealings with the Rwandans are a legitimate issue, however, and illustrate a problem with appointees that goes far beyond Rice. A distinctive feature of the U.S. system of government is the installation, with the advent of each new presidential administration, of a huge number of political appointees, thousands of them, going far below the level of cabinet secretaries. This system has several problems.

Although usually rationalized in terms of helping to ensure that the president's policies and preferences are implemented, the system instead injects the personal preferences of many other people who shape policies that are below the president's radar.

The system entails great disruption and persistent vacancies with each change of administration. The system means that the staffing of much of the government is determined in large part by who happened to play most successfully during the primary campaign season the game of hitching one's wagon to a rising star.

Rice's attachment to Kagame's government illustrates yet another problem, which is the baggage that in-and-outers may acquire during periods that they are out of government. Different types of jobs entail different degrees and types of baggage problems.

What is most often thought of are financial interests left over from some lucrative private-sector employment, although problems related to that can be ameliorated through arrangements such as blind trusts. Probably harder to deal with is the legacy of the kind of relationship Rice had with Kagame.

Consulting firms whose shingles feature former senior officials who recently left office are selling influence and access at least as much as they are selling expert advice. Relationships that are ones of advocacy, trust, and taking action on behalf of the client's interests are not relationships that can be turned on and off like a light switch.

The political systems of most other advanced democracies avoid most of these problems. The top national layer in those systems is peopled by a small political class that includes ministers who sit in cabinets and who, to do so, must subject themselves to a vote of the electorate.

Below them is a professional bureaucracy, part of whose defining characteristic (Japan is a conspicuous exception) is a commitment to execute faithfully the policies of whichever political masters are currently in office. The bureaucrats do not try to inject their own policies, and they do not acquire baggage from stints outside government.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as a [blog post](#) at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

Swanson Critiques Parry's New Book

Robert Parry's new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, details how Republican treason became normalized through the actions of Richard Nixon, George H.W. Bush, Ronald Reagan and others, but it lets the Democrats off too easily, writes David Swanson at warisacrime.org.

By David Swanson

How did right-wing politics in the United States survive the 1960s and 1970s and thrive beyond? Not only did the wealthy invest in the corruption of politics, but the politicians invested in the normalization of treason.

When presidential candidate Richard Nixon sabotaged the peace process in Vietnam, President Lyndon Johnson privately called it treason and publicly kept his mouth shut. By the time Bush the Elder, also involved in that earlier treason, worked with Robert Gates and William Casey to sabotage President Carter's efforts to free hostages in Iran, the normalization was well underway.

The corruption of Watergate involved not only no-holds-barred political thievery, but also Nixon's fear that Daniel Ellsberg or the Brookings Institution or someone else had possession of a file detailing Nixon's successful 1968 efforts to prevent the war on Vietnam from ending.

The Iran-Contra scandal that grew out of the U.S.-Israeli-Iranian plot to replace Carter with Reagan, and the Iraq-gate scandal that followed, witnessed a last fling of half-hearted pushback in Congress and the corporate media. Today such non-sexual scandals no longer end in -gate. In fact, they are no longer scandals.

Piling George W. Bush's blatantly stolen elections onto the history of recent U.S. politics calls into question the ability of Republicans to get elected to national office without cheating. But the normalization of treason has been very much a bi-partisan affair.

Robert Parry, who runs the invaluable website ConsortiumNews.com, has a new book out called "America's Stolen Narrative." My recommendation is to immediately read this book from Chapter 2 through to the end.

The introduction and chapter 1 depict President Barack Obama as having nothing but the best intentions, glorify the American Revolution, argue in favor of a strong federal government, and defend the practice of requiring people to purchase private health insurance (a Republican idea in its origins, of course,

although Parry has adopted it as Democratic and good).

Also, Chapter 3 takes a detour into arguing unpersuasively for lesser-evilism. If you're into that sort of thing, knock yourselves out. But in my view such discussions muddle and belittle the significance of the rest of this tremendously important book.

The "stolen narratives" referred to in the title are the accurate accounts that Parry presents of the treasonous acts I've mentioned above. Parry is an investigative journalist who has unearthed powerful evidence of the crimes of Nixon, Reagan and others. Parry not only details the evidence but recounts the processes of coverup and distortion that the U.S. media has made its second nature.

The result of this history is, I'm afraid, far worse than Parry's opening pages let on. Not only do Americans imagine that their politicians mean well when they do not, particularly in the area of foreign policy, but the United States has fundamentally accepted unlimited presidential powers.

Nixon's crimes during his famous cover-up, and the far worse underlying crimes as well, have now been legalized and accepted. Presidents do not answer to Congress or the public or the Constitution or the Bill of Rights.

To a great extent, the people of our country have accepted temporary despots, and to a great extent our people falsely believe themselves powerless to act. They imagine the Left did something wrong through acting. This is part of how history must be explained when leaving out the fact that the Right has been cheating.

Parry's account of Nixon's undoing of peace in Vietnam, allowing for another four years of slaughter in Southeast Asia, is the best I've seen and alone worth the purchase of *America's Stolen Narrative*.

Parry imagines what it might have meant, not only for peace in the world, but also for social justice and the "war on poverty" in the United States had Hubert Humphrey defeated Nixon. To the extent that Nixon's successful electoral sabotage in 1968 opened the door to dirtier politics ever since, the damage can be multiplied.

Needless to say, that door was always somewhat opened. The Business Plot of 1933 was hardly less treasonous than anything Nixon did. Nixon's go-between with the Vietnamese in 1968 was the widow of Claire Lee Chennault who had worked to provide China with U.S. planes, pilots and training to plan the firebombing of Japan and provoke Japan into the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Our false narratives still require the acceptance or glorification of all things related to World War II, but in fact one can see a bit of the husband in the widow Chennault. And then there's the assassination of President Kennedy, which evidence suggests George H.W. Bush played a role in as in most of Parry's post-1960's narrative. But Parry's case that we turned a corner toward a nastier political world with the Nixon presidency is a strong one.

The account of the Carter-Reagan October Surprise is also the best I've seen, in terms of the evidence presented and the background provided, including on the central role of the Israeli government. The same gang that hung President Carter out to dry for failing to free the hostages had earlier pressured him to bring the Shah of Iran to the United States, thereby provoking the fears of Iranians and the seizure of the U.S. Embassy.

The weapons shipments to Iran later grew into the Iran-Contra scandal, but common understanding of that scandal fails to trace it to its roots in the treasonous bargain that kept the hostages prisoners until the day of Reagan's inauguration.

Parry devotes whole chapters to the history of corrupt manipulation by a couple of the dirtiest individuals in Washington: Colin Powell and Robert Gates. These two manage their heights of corruption and influence, in part, through their cross-partisanship. Democrats in Parry's worldview seem to be largely battered wives failing to push back, failing to speak out, refusing to investigate or prosecute or impeach. True enough, as far as it goes.

But I think there is a great measure of complicity and outright expansion of bipartisan abuses that must be credited to the Democrats as well. An accurate understanding of exactly how evil some of our Republicans have been need not turn us into cheerleaders for the party of the current president, his record classifications, his groundbreaking secrecy claims, his record whistleblower prosecutions, his record levels of warrantless spying, his imprisonments without trial, his wars without Congress, his war-making CIA, or his "kill list" murder program.

Instead, an accurate understanding of how evil some of our politicians have been should move us to become, like Robert Parry, dogged pursuers of the facts that those in power seek to bury or beautify.

[Parry's book is available in [print here](#) or as an e-book from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#).]

David Swanson's books include [War Is A Lie](#). He blogs at <http://davidswanson.org> and <http://warisacrime.org> and works as Campaign Coordinator for the online

activist organization <http://rootsaction.org>. He hosts [Talk Nation Radio](#). Follow him on Twitter: [@davidcswanson](#) and [FaceBook](#).
